

CHAPTER 3

KINSHIP, CASTE AND CLASS EARLY SOCIETIES

(C 600 BCE-600 CE)

Q7. How the Manusmriti has define the features and functions of chandalas?

What some Chinese travelers have written about them ?

Ans. (i) The Manusmriti (compiled c. 2nd century (CE) laid down what it described as the duties of the chandalas. They were expected to live outside the village use discarded bowls with dogs and donkeys as their wealth. They were to wear the clothes of the dead and eat out of broken dishes wear ornaments of black iron and wander constantly. They were not to walk about in villages and cities at night. They had to handle the bodies of those who had no relatives and act as executioners.

(ii) Much later in the account of his travels the Chinese Buddhish monk Fa Xian (5th century CE) wrote that the untouchables had to sound a clapper in the streets of the town to warn the people of their presence. Another Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang (7th century CE) observed that executioners and scavengers were forced to live outside the city and their houses were marked.

Q8. Textual traditions are one of the major sources for understanding the process of changes. Explain the statement in about 100 words.

Ans. Textual traditions are of the major sources for understanding changes in the economy and polity. Some texts laid down norms of social behaviour. Others described and occasionally commented on a wide range of social situation and practices. And we can catch a glimpse of some social actors from inscriptions. Each of these sources is written from the perspective of

some social categories. So we need to keep in mind who composed it and for whom. We also need to consider the language of the text, and ways in which it circulated.

Q9. The following is an excerpt from the Mahabarta in which Yudishtra, the eldest Pandava speaks to Sanjaya a messenger :

Sanjaya convey my respectful greetings to all the Brahmanas and the chief priest of the house of Dhritarashtra. I bow respectfully to teacher Drona.....I hold the feet of our preceptor Kripa.... (and) the chief of the Kurus, the great Bhishma. I bow respectfully to the old king (Dhritarashtra). I greet and ask after the health of his son Dhritarashtra and his younger brother..... Also greet all the young Kuruwarriors who are our brothers sons and grandsons..... Greet above all him who is to us like father and mother, the wise Vidura (born of a slave woman).... I bow to the elderly ladies who are known as our mother. To those who are our wives you say this, "I hope they are well protected... Our daughters in law born of good families and mothers of children greet on my behalf. Embrace for me those who are our daughters..... The beautiful fragrant well dressed courtesans of ours you should also greet. Greet the slave women and their children greet the aged the maimed (and) the helpless.

Try and identify the criteria used to make this list in terms of age, gender kinship ties. Are there any other criteria ? For each category explain why are placed in a particular position in the list.

Ans. The criteria had been used to make this list the terms of age gender and kinship ties in brief ca be mention in this way :

- i) First of all respect should be paid to all the Brahmanas and the chief priest of the ruler.
- ii) Secondly Guru Dronacharya should be honoured.

- iii) The great old man Bhishmpitama was given place of honour at third position.
- iv) After that Yudhisthira bow respectfully to old king and his young brother to all these people he considered like his father and then he should respect to female members of Kuru family as his mothers – Kinship were honoured.
- v) At next place Yudhisthira showed honoured to Vidhura born of a slave women. After that the elderly ladies and daughters and mother of children were given respect.
- vi) There is other criteria also respect should be shown equally to all elder persons whether they are from royal families or they are Brahamans or from any other Varnas because age should be given first of all regard without considering gender and blood relation.
- vii) Yudhisthira put his list of honour keeping of view the old traditions of Brahamans text (books) and maintaining the old social order generally followed during the epic age.

Q10. This is what a famous historian of Indian literature Maurice Winternitz, wrote about the Mahabarata: “just because Mahabarata represents more of an entire literature..... and contains so much and so many kinds of things..... (it) gives (s) us an insight into the most profound depths of the sold of the Indian folk”....Discuss.

Ans. There are several literary sources to reconstruct ancient Indian history. Mahabarata is one of them. This is a famous historical source. Its importance has been recognized in not by Indian historian but also by foreign and western historian for example Maurice Winternitz wrote about great epic just because the Mahabarata represents more of an entire literature. It contains to so many kinds of hints related with different aspects of the Indian lives. It we study this vast book it gives us and inside

into the most profound depth of the soul of the Indian people. For example Mahabharata was written in Sanskrit, a language meant also exclusively for priests and elites. However the Sanskrit used is simpler than that of the Vedas. Therefore it was probably widely understood.

Historians usually classify the contents of the present text under two broad heads sections that contain stories designated as the narrative and section that contain prescriptions about social norms designated as didactic. This division is by no means watertight – the didactic sections include stories and the narrative often contains a social message. However generally historians agree that the Mahabharata was meant to be dramatic moving story and that the didactic portions were probably added later.

Interestingly the text is described as an itihasa within early Sanskrit tradition. The literal meaning of the term is thus it was which is why it is generally translated as history. Was there a real war that was remembered in the epic ? We are not sure. Some historians think that the memory of an actual conflict amongst kinfolk was preserved in the narrative others point out that there is no other corroborative evidence of the battle.

Who wrote the Mahabharata. This is a question to which there are several answers. The original story was probably composed by charioteer bards known as sutas who generally accompanied Kshatriya warriors to the battlefield and composed poems celebrating their victories and other achievements. These compositions circulated orally. Then, from the fifth century BCE, Brahmanas took over the story and began to commit it to writing. This was the time when chiefdoms such as those of the Kurus and Panchalas around whom the story of the epic revolves, were gradually becoming kingdoms. Did the new things want their itihasa to be recorded and preserved more systematically ? It is also possible that the upheavals that often accompanied the establishment of these states, where old social